

W r e s t l i n g P e r s p e c t i v e

Volume VI § Issue 54 • The Forum For Professional Wrestling Debate • \$1.50

It Almost Make Sense: Nitro Is Hot

By - MacArthur & Skolnick

After several years of one failure after another, the seemingly impossible has occurred: World Championship Wrestling has an apparent winner on its hands. The debut of *Monday Nitro* on September 4, shows that maybe the brass at WCW know something about the wrestling business after all. Well, maybe that's pushing it. These are the same people who spend money on ridiculous skits instead of quality talent. These are the same executives who push a wrestler based on who he's friends with outside the ring, not what he knows inside the ring. These are the businessmen who gave their loyal pay-per-view audiences an endless array of screw-jobs and subpar matches. However, WCW's past - and most likely present - business aptitude should not obscure the fact that for the first time since Ted Turner bought the company, WCW has developed a successful television program.

Although it was occasionally rushed and the acting by Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage was poor, *Monday Nitro*'s debut was possibly the best WCW free television program since the 1989 *Clash of the Champions: New York Knockout*, which was headlined by a five-star "I Quit" match between Ric Flair and Terry Funk. For all its blemishes, there was a special aura that made *Monday Nitro* seem exciting. The lighting and camera work was easily the WCW's best effort in years, without any of their nauseating trademark super closeups that blind the viewer to any action in the ring. The matches were solid, the pacing fast and furious, and Lex Luger's appearance was the biggest surprise in wrestling since Jim Cornette showed up at a World Wrestling Federation television taping in Alexandria Bay, New York, two years ago.

The Luger angle made many fans actually care about the Total Package; a wrestler who has failed to generate much heat or interest since his monster push in 1993. Luger's return to WCW, as well as the appearances of Jushin Liger and Mike "I.R.S. - V.K. Wallstreet" Rotunda, put fans on notice that *Monday Nitro* is the program to watch for excitement and surprises. It also put the World Wrestling Federation on notice that WCW means business with it comes to becoming the top wrestling company in the United States.

Monday Nitro is by no means perfect. In the crucial area of announcing, there are major problems. Steve McMichael is WCW's answer to Rob Bartlett, the short-lived co-host of *Monday Night Raw* during its formative days. McMichael doesn't have much knowledge of the business or, for that matter, WCW's wrestlers. To his credit, he shows great enthusiasm, but he is nothing short of obnoxious behind the microphone. McMichael's arrogant manner would not be nearly as annoying if he were not being positioned as a babyface. However, he is. WCW has apparently forgotten that the last self-serving obnoxious babyface to get over behind the microphone was Roddy Piper, and he only achieved that success because of his long run as a hated heel. If McMichael is to be kept on the program, someone at WCW needs to review his broadcasts, tell him what he is doing wrong and teach him how to correct his flaws. That is not an unprecedented task: announcing instructors and acting coaches do it all the time. To be fair to McMichael, how does he know he is terrible if no one tells him? Then again, aside from the underutilized Chris Cruise, who in WCW is actually capable of coaching him?

Eric Bischoff, who hosts the show and was behind the development of *Nitro* is very aggressive, bordering on a late-Eighties Vince McMahon. He has shown some promise, particularly compared to his past performances, which have ranged from almost-competent to terrible. His work on *Nitro*, however, has been credible. Excepting the fantastic Todd Petingill, Bischoff's youthful look and enthusiasm is a fresh contrast compared to the other announcers in WCW and the WWF.

Some consider Bischoff's attacks on the competition as childish. We, however, consider his bombastic in-your-face attitude to be a positive ingredient in such a competitive atmosphere. Giving away the finish of *Monday Night Raw*'s September 12 main event and saying it was an old match was a shock, but more importantly, it was effective. If the competition gives you an opening - in this case, showing an old match - attack. That is basic business strategy. If anything, the only real shock was witnessing WCW successfully implement an offensive marketing tactic. To that end, Bischoff is worthy of praise. He still can't call a match, but he is trying to make up for his lack of wrestling knowledge with energy and hardcore salesmanship. If this strategy seems less than sound, remember it worked for McMahon. Besides, there is not a politically viable announcer in WCW who can call a match anyway.

As for Bobby Heenan, he is, well, Bobby Heenan. Either you love him or you hate him. He doesn't change much, but he is still the best comedic color commentator in the game. To that end, unless *Nitro* plans on selling credibility and wrestling strategy instead of hot angles and Hogan, Heenan is an appropriate member of the announcing team.

Nitro is the underdog. It is going against a proven ratings winner in *Monday Night Raw*. Many wrestling experts said it was suicide for WCW to go head-to-head with the WWF's showcase program. The experts said attacking a company's strong point would be a mistake, perhaps a fatal one for Bischoff, who personally asked Turner for the opportunity to challenge *Raw*. *Raw* is, in fact, the WWF's only present day success. House show attendance is slowly improving, but on the whole, the house show is still a money loser. Pay-per-view buy rates are not climbing, and will never rebound to late-Eighties levels. Syndicated television ratings are pathetic, with the syndicated product being pushed into less desirable timeslots due to the dwindling ratings of the former flagship television programs. If *Nitro* can damage *Raw*'s ratings, it will have a negative

impact on the only current success in the WWF.

Bischoff's decision to go head-to-head with *Raw* has been misunderstood by many who consider such a move to be unprecedented. Actually, the broadcast networks have placed strong television programs against each other for years, whenever they sense a weakness. FOX moved *The Simpsons* from its successful timeslot on Sunday nights to Thursday nights and placed it head to head with the most successful program of the Eighties: *The Cosby Show*. Many called the move suicide. However, *The Simpsons* eroded some of *The Cosby Show*'s audience and FOX was able to build a successful Thursday night lineup with *The Simpsons* as its anchor. While neither *The Simpsons* or *The Cosby Show* attained the level of success they would have if they were not competing with each other, the move served its purpose and eventually, FOX moved *The Simpsons* back to Sunday nights when it served no competitive purpose on Thursdays.

Similar tactics were implemented by NBC last year when they moved the very successful *Frasier* from Thursday to Tuesday nights opposite *Roseanne*, a program NBC felt was fading. A move NBC felt would re-establish itself on Tuesday nights. ABC, sensing NBC's strategy was solid, moved its flagship program, *Home Improvement*, from Wednesdays to Tuesdays opposite *Frasier*, and protected *Roseanne* by moving it to Wednesdays, where there was less fierce competition. Now, *Frasier* is less successful than it was on Thursdays, but it has pulled up the ratings of the previously unsuccessful Tuesday night lineup. *Home Improvement*'s rating are not as strong as they were on Wednesdays, but the move protected ABC's number one position on Tuesday nights.

Bischoff is attacking his competition, not at its weakest point, but at its strongest point, hoping that if he can knock off the WWF's flagship program, he will destroy McMahon's pride and will to win. Bischoff need not even defeat *Raw* for his plan to be successful. All he needs to do is achieve something unprecedented in WCW's history:

parity with the WWF. If his aggressive tactics work, and WCW becomes the WWF's equal on Monday nights, then he will have accomplished the impossible by wounding Goliath with his pea shooter. From there, a complete victory over the WWF almost seems plausible.

Bischoff's plan may work. In the short run, it has had a negative impact on *Raw*'s ratings, but it far too soon to make a complete evaluation of the situation. Remember, WCW has not had enough time to self-destruct.

The Monday Night Fights have only just begun. WCW is off to an excellent start, but the key is to maintain the quality, surprises and excitement of the first few *Nitro* shows over the long haul. The tag team title change and the Flair-Brian Pillman match, announced one day earlier, on the third *Nitro* were good moves, showing fans that it is "must see TV;" the place where important action occurs. An added bonus is that cards have been drawing decent, albeit papered, houses, which should increase the confidence and momentum WCW has received in the past few weeks. A major problem the *Nitro* vs. *Raw* situation brings to the table is the need to make the Monday night program a ratings winner every week. That could quickly lead to constant hotshotting, a confusing number of turns and a booking philosophy that helped send Jim Crockett Promotions to bankruptcy court in 1988.

The people who brought us the Dungeon of Doom, the overpush of Hogan and one major gaff after another, may finally have stumbled onto something successful. The recent additions of outstanding workers such as Sabu, Eddy Guerrero, Chris Benoit and Dean Malenko and the action on *Monday Nitro* may be the keys to bringing back the longtime fans who have abandoned WCW. It is possible the company could overcome the WWF and produce a week-in, week-out ratings winner filled with action and excitement. They are on their way to doing that now. However, for WCW to win their war with the WWF, they must first overcome their biggest obstacle: the fact that they are WCW.

Sidelines

Thanks To Sheldon Goldberg, Evan Ginzburg and Dave Scherer for their plugs. We appreciate the support.

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In Perspective: Les Thatcher

In part 2 of an interview conducted by David Skolnick, Smoky Mountain Wrestling Announcer Les Thatcher discusses the state of the wrestling business, working for Ron Fuller and Jim Cornette and running his wrestling school.

LT: Getting back to your career, how long were you in Georgia?

LT: I stayed there until February/March of '74.

WP: Were you still in the ring?

LT: When I went down there, I didn't work

at first. I had a little problem with the knee, so I did color with Gordon Solie. Leo Garabaldi was back in the office and Bill Watts. Some good minds. I was doing the program, the weekly, they sold in the arenas. It was something Leo had taught me. I also helped out with promotions, trying to put some new life into the promotion. Trying to get things going with businesses down there. I did work a little bit down there. Bobby Shane was there at the time. Talking about carrying jackets, he did it in St. Louis in '62 or '63. You hear so much about

Bobby Shane from the boys in the business. If you saw the tapes, you'd think, "I'm not impressed." You'd expect more in terms of movement. With Bobby, it was the personality. His timing was great. We worked a deal with that abrasive personality of his. He finally goaded me into giving him a shot. We went around. Then there was a switch in the office. Jim Barnette bought in and Lester Welch sold his end. Gordon was supposed to go back to Florida and stop making the commute. I was going to handle the TV. We talked, "Well," this

is Atlanta, early '70s, "you're going to try to match this big market with hockey, basketball, football, baseball. They're all carrying two. A color and a play-by-play man. If you want to look professional, you do the same thing." Leo and Watts were in agreement and that's the way we stuck with it. When Jim came in, he started hacking the budget. He wanted to politically align himself with Eddie in Florida. So, and he told me this, Gordon stayed and I went back to the Carolinas. I picked up back there and started doing some TV and went back to wrestling. That was in early '74. In the early fall of '74 Ron Fuller called me. He and I had become good friends in Florida. His youngest son is my godson. He decided to buy John Cazana out in Knoxville. At the time, John didn't run it as a territory. He ran Knoxville and a couple of the outlying cities. He usually ran Friday and Saturday and the rest of the week he was down. He had some of his own talent and for the most part got the rest from Gulas out in Nashville. Ron wanted to set it up and run it as a territory. He said I could come in and help with the TV. He said, "I don't know anything about it. You've been doing the television. Some of the ideas we used to kick around. Let's try something new." This was something, David, new ideas weren't welcome (laughs). If it was good enough in 1940, it's good enough now. "We don't do things like that." "Why?" "No good reason, we just don't do them." I started with him and he opened for business in November '74. I went in the first weekend, he picked me up at the airport and we had lunch. We talked and went back to his house to lay out the TV and I said, "Where are your formats?" "We don't have one." I said, "Excuse me." "We don't have one." They didn't use a format. I worked with the TV's before that when I was in Tennessee. I worked on top when TV first came in with a guy named Whitey Caldwell. He and I were the top babyfaces and the Wright Brothers were the top heels. At that time, I was not involved in production. I didn't know what a format was. I realized these guys are flying blind. We sat there and roughed up the format. Put the first *Southeastern*

Championship Wrestling together. We went up to the station the next morning and said to this guy, "Where's the format?" "We don't use the format." "Well, you're using one now." We moved from a little UHF station to the CBS affiliate in '75. We got into the whole new production thing. That was a great run. From that point in November of '74, I was living in Charlotte and I was wrestling, not full-time as you'll understand in a moment. Someday, I'd go to the Charlotte office, sit down with the booker. We laid out all the interviews for all the cards that we had to do. At that time, I think Mid-Atlantic was on 32 different stations. We had to cut two 2-minute promos for each show, plus 30-second spots to use during the other times on the station. I made up idiot sheets with the rundown of the building, date, top matches, etc. I started getting ready. We go to Raleigh Wednesday morning. We start about noon. I stand in the middle of the set. They've got perforated paper that comes through the wire hanging from music stands and they'd shove one under the camera lens. I'd do one 2-minute with the guy coming in from the ring and they'd pull that cue sheet out and shove another one in. The guy coming in from the left would be doing the last interview on the tape. Now, we're doing the first interview on this tape. We ran like this for sometimes like four hours. A little break for the bathroom. Grab a Coke or something and break and come back and do two shows that night. We did the two shows Wednesday and then drive back into Charlotte Thursday. I'd go into the Charlotte office and get my itinerary for the next week lined up and Friday, get on a plane to Knoxville. Got together, did the TV, wrestled in Knoxville Friday night. Nelson Royal and I were the tag team champions up there. Saturday morning, we did our TV, worked a spot show Saturday night, got back on a plane Sunday morning and went back to Charlotte and started all over again. Wrestling three times a week through all this. This was '74, '75, '76.

WP: Were you looking to get out of the ring at that point?

LT: I was looking to get off the merry-go-round (laughs). I know I was ready to cut way back. I still enjoyed it, but I was trying to juggle too many balls obviously.

WP: Obviously, you got more money for wrestling.

LT: Yeah, the TV wasn't all that lucrative at that time. Of course, Charlotte was good. I was doing Crockett's magazine. We were doing a bi-monthly, four color. I was involved in that. I got a piece of that action. Nelson and I were tag champions, so we worked high on the card in Knoxville. I realized with the TVs, this you can do for a long time. At some point, the body's going to give out and the wrestling's going to be over. I moved to Knoxville in '77 and stayed there till '90. Ron gave me run of the television in terms of putting together some new stuff.

WP: Like what?

LT: We did a thing right in the middle of the program called "Personality Profile." It was low-key. We sold the person opposed to selling a gimmick, a match or an angle. It got over. A lot of people didn't think it would. To give you an example, Bob Armstrong. We did background, high school, blah, blah, blah. To give you an example how the thing was accepted. He and I when we used to travel together we used to play rock 'n roll trivia. He'd give me the title of a Fifties song, I'd have to give him the artist and back and forth, just to kill time. At the end of our little five-minute thing, I said, "Hey, I was telling the fans that we used to this when we traveled together. Are you still any good at that?" He said, "I can still beat you." We threw a couple back and forth. That's how we closed the segment. Next Friday night at the matches in Knoxville, a very nice dressed lady comes walking up, "Mr. Thatcher, I'm so-and-so and I'm secretary to Professor so-and-so with the agriculture or history department at the University of Tennessee. He watches your program. He saw you and Mr. Armstrong on 'Personality Profile.' He is also a rock 'n roll trivia buff and here are two type-written pages for each of you with questions to see how good

you really are.” He wanted to know if we were working or shooting, I guess (laughs). The point I’m making there is the guy was interested in Bob and me in something other than just the surface.

WP: WCW doesn’t do that enough. When it is done, it always gets over.

LT: I think, David, especially more so now, our business is selling superheroes. Superheroes are one-dimensional. If you give them another dimension, it’s like going to the stock car races and Richard Petty drives a Pontiac, you identify with him because you drive a Pontiac. This guy’s a stamp collector and you are too. You like him a little bit better. To back way up, I first encountered that when I went to Atlanta in ’66. Garabaldi wanted to get me interviewed on TV. I wasn’t figured into anything. I just got into town. He said, “When you sent your press stuff, you had the thing about the drag racing. Is that real or is that just publicity?” I said, “No, it’s real.” He said, “Do you know anything about drag racing in Georgia?” “Sure, there’s a lot of good tracks here.” A lot of the top super-stalk and FX drivers were out of the Georgia area at the time in the mid-Sixties. He said, “We’ll have Ed talk to you about wrestling, but since we don’t have you figured into anything now, we’ll get into that. You can talk about the drag strips and add some local flavor.” We do the interviews. A week or so later, I’m in Augusta. A lady comes walking up with a boy in tow. She said, “Hi, we watch Georgia Championship Wrestling every week and this is my grandson. He’s been watching with me for years. He has never been to the auditorium until tonight. The only reason he came tonight was he heard you talking about race cars on television.” I sold a ticket for a wrestling match talking about a drag race. That stuck in my mind through the years. It’s not a brilliant concept. *People* magazine does it every week. That’s what they want to see. We’re selling superheroes and they know the superheroes aren’t real. Animal of the Road Warriors. I used to talk to his wife occasionally. I was with a company in Cincinnati that trained body builders and sold supplements. Joe’s wife

was a bodybuilder too. She had mentioned Joe in the summer helping their boys with knot-hole. Right away I envisioned doing a “Personality Profile” showing him as Animal in the ring and then jumping to the baseball diamond showing his other side. I’m an old-timer. I’ve been told that would expose the business. That’s been done. They used to tell me I couldn’t do these things in the Seventies because the heel has to be a heel. I never believed that you thought the top heel went home and kicked his wife. That’s a side of the business we refuse to sell and I think that’s the only side we have left to sell. People like yourself and Dave Meltzer, who began as fans, those are the people that read your papers. If you want to draw those people back, that’s what you have to draw them with. Did you happen to see our legends tape from last year?

WP: No.

LT: Jimmy had the idea to do a legends segment building up for this Friday in August. We covered some of the wrestlers invited who were being inducted into the Hall of Fame. We went out to the old Amphitheater. It was empty. I did my first segment there. Those things. I was surprised, got more reaction from within the business. I was at a WWF taping here a couple of nights before the show and I was introduced to Johnny Polo. I said, “I see you on the show. You do a good job.” He said, “I like you too, especially those legends segments.” I said, “Where do you see those?” He said, “We watch them at the office every week.” I said, “Thank you very much.” He said, “We need to do more of that. I mentioned to one of the guys in the office, ‘Hey, they’re giving our business a history. We never had a history before.’” We seldom acknowledge deaths. I know years ago promoters wouldn’t do that. Since the business is the way it is now, all these little things are needed. There should be no controversy over that guy being a heel and you can’t talk to him like he’s a human being because people know better. You can sell the personality and they’re not doing enough of it.

WP: You worked Knoxville until when?

LT: Ron bought the Gulf Coast territory too and we were doing some TV work out of Knoxville and he sold that to Barnette. I stayed there thorough the transition.

WP: He didn’t can you that time?

LT: (laughs) The funny thing is that’s where the name Thatcher came from. Barnette gave it to me. Jim was a demanding boss, but he took care of his people. He was sometimes difficult to deal with, but he was fair for the most part. I stayed there through the transition. The territory floundered when that war started with the ICW. I saw those guys. Randy and Angelo were involved, but not in the mudslinging. That helped kill that area for a while.

WP: The competition?

LT: The way they were going about it. It was like they were airing their dirty laundry on TV.

WP: Wouldn’t Randy go to the competitor’s show and challenge people?

LT: Oh yeah, they did that down in Memphis too. Of course, it comes down to pick your spots. “David, if I know I can’t whoop ya, I’m not going to challenge ya.” I had friends there and that’s the worst part. You’re stuck in the middle of the thing, like Atlanta in ’73.

WP: The territory died. Then what happened?

LT: I went to Florida to work for Fuller for a while. Then Flair, Mulligan and Crockett Jr. bought the Knoxville territory from Atlanta from Barnette. Ric called me and said, “Hey channel 10 said if we can get you to do the show, they’d prefer it. They had a good working arrangement with you. We’d like to have you too.” Of all the cities I’ve lived in Cincinnati is home. But Knoxville is my second home.

WP: You knew Flair from Charlotte.

LT: Yes, I’d worked with Ric when he was in the business for a year. I thought he was a natural. He makes a prophet out of me. He’d been in the business for a year at about 280 pounds. He came out of Verne’s

camp, so you think he's going to be stiff as a board. Of course, being young and big. I worked with him in Richmond, Virginia, at the fairgrounds. I went out there, expecting the worst and was pleasantly surprised. I'd never met the kid before in my life. We had a real good match. I remember telling the guys in the dressing room, "This kid's going someplace. He's a natural." When he came to the Carolinas, he never left. He made one move in his career and never made another one. All of the veterans involved in anything at all had a hand in helping him put his thing together. He worked with Rip Hawk as a partner. He used to look at a lot of Buddy Rogers' films. A hell of a talent. Still a hell of a talent if allowed to be.

WP: That Knoxville promotion couldn't have lasted too much longer.

LT: No, it didn't. We were supposed to have Roanoke put into our territory to give us another big town. Kevin Sullivan came in. Kevin had been in Knoxville in the Seventies. I was handling TV and he was handling booking. It came back pretty good, but it couldn't sustain. Again, they started tearing down. Jack finally, I don't know if he sold out. Jimmy Crockett Jr. ended up with the whole thing and eventually shut the whole damn thing down. I freelanced for a while. I was going over for Carlos Colon and doing the English voice-over for the tapes for Barbados and Trinidad. I used to go down to San Juan. To the other end of the island to, my God, this Neanderthal TV station with old egg crates (laughs). I'd sit there with a TV monitor. I'd put my coat on to do an opening and then I'd get comfortable and kick back and do my play-by-play off the TV. Put the coat back on and do the wrap. We'd stay down there all day. Sometimes get a hotel and finish up the next morning. I worked every month or five weeks. I freelanced for them.

WP: It was a pretty wild scene there.

LT: Yeah, that was a tough place. I worked San Juan the first time from the Tampa office. The first thing they tell you in Clemente Stadium is when you go back in

that dugout, cover your head and run like hell or they're going to throw the stadium at you. You know when you see security like militia with automatic weapons (laughs) these people are to be taken seriously. The was the thing nice though about Tampa. You got to go to Nassau, Freeport, a few exotic ports of call.

WP: Did you ever work with Dusty?

LT: I never worked directly in the same territory with Dust. A few times I'd sub for Gordon when he was on vacation or go down for a special deal. They'd bring him into the Carolinas.

WP: Did you get blood all over you with Dusty? He was juicing all over the place back then.

LT: The whole business was that way. With this AIDS thing, every time I see juice some place, I wonder. I don't know how the guys must feel. If it fit into a match and somebody said, "How about doing it?" "Okay, no problem, it's business." But I don't know.

WP: You'd have second thoughts today?

LT: I might, yeah, I might. But who knows? If I was 20 years old again and had that fire in my belly... just show me the ring and tell me what you want. That's what I enjoy about these guys I work with. It takes me back. I see the fire in their eyes and their enthusiasm. That makes you feel good.

WP: Your last match was when?

LT: Late '78. Just for no reason other than it became a drudgery to lace the boots up. I was always in the mind that if I couldn't give 100 percent, I shouldn't give anything. I was in Knoxville. The last match I had was with Dennis Condrey. He was a good boy. I don't know what happened to him.

WP: He got a little f—ked in the head.

LT: (laughs) To be in this business, we're all a little f—ked in the head. That's kind of a prerequisite. After all, you know Terry Funk (laughs). I tease Dory. "Dory, you're the only sane quiet Texan I've ever met in this business. You honestly aren't from

there are you?" They are different. One time, they were all in Charlotte for some type of deal. Their dad too. I picked the three of them up. The lady at the desk said, "These guys yours?" Senior points to Terry and said, "He is, but," turning to Junior said, "I don't know who he belongs to." Actually it was a compliment (laughs). He was the only sane one. That was a crew, the three of them.

WP: You freelanced for who else?

LT: Ann Gunkel was trying to put her act back together, which never really transpired. I was doing some work for Mario Savoldi. Back then, Carlos was involved and Mark Lewin was up there with Brody and Kevin and Gary Hart. They brought in quite a crew of guys.

WP: That sounds like quite a crew.

LT: (laughs) I hadn't thought of in those termed, but yes. Insanity incorporated. I did that. Before that, I was an agent for WCW, covering Ohio and West Virginia and Michigan when they were going up here on the tours. That was '82, '83 for Barnette until the power struggle. That was good then. Business was tremendous.

WP: This was the time when McMahon went national. Did you think that was it for you?

LT: I didn't know how it would float. Call me a diehard, but in some way or form the territories will have to exist again because there is that need for new talent. When I broke in, I had a chance to work. The guys don't have that chance today. Dory Jr. and I were talking a few days ago about the school and he said, "Baba's always looking for new talent, but there's no place to get that. If you've got someone who will fit into that mold, let me know and we can take a look at him. We're always looking." Everybody is. There is no place to develop that. The problem with running the whole country is back when there were territories, a territory fell off, there were other places where business was booming. Now if the whole country falls off, the whole country is off. That's the problem now. They can ride through this dry spell for another two

years. Part of it also, David, is everybody's in such a hurry. "Let's do it yesterday." We don't build stories anymore. We don't take any time. There's also room for wrestling history. The biggest problem is there's nothing consistent. If you knew there was going to be a particular segment on *WCW Saturday Night* or *Monday Night Raw* every week, that's what might lock you in, if you made it more like a magazine show. When I look at that *Saturday Night*, I start salivating. If you look at that thing, there's always something that doesn't have to be there. Take that time and utilize it.

WP: There's a ton of wasted time on that show.

LT: Sure, take it and sell Rob Parker. Who is Rob Parker? Or sell Brian Pillman or whoever. Sting has been on that show for how many years?

WP: About seven, or so.

LT: And do you think anyone knows who Sting is except for Sting? Sell the gym concept. Go behind the scenes. Rejuvenate this guy because they've left him hanging in limbo. He's not the talent he once was, but the worst thing to do is stagnate and not be involved in anything. You'd be better off getting your butt beat every week. At least you're involved. There's a lot of wasted time there. There are guys being pushed who don't need to be pushed.

WP: How many squash matches can you take?

LT: That's it. Especially when it come down to the guy waiting in the ring is going to get beat and the guy with all the music is going to be the winner. Simple enough. Let's change the channel and find out what's going on somewhere else. I think ECW has some good production ideas. I don't know Paul E. Dangerously, but I think he's got some good stuff. But I think they spend too much time grinding axes. I was always taught that the 58:30 you've got is the most valuable piece of property you own. I'm not going to use it to throw daggers. Like you, you've got so many pages in the *Perspective* and you take half of them knocking the *Torch* and the *Observer*, you

can't even sell your own product.

WP: And the people watching ECW already hate the WWF and WCW. You're not opening their eyes to anything.

LT: No, no. And the other thing too is you being a wrestling fan. Myself, I was a fan, Kevin Sullivan has said that some of the best people in the business were fans. Cornette's the same way. He's still a fan. Fans are fickle. I remember reading how Smoky was all the rage two years ago and now we have to wipe mud off us all the time. They found a new idol and next year it will be someone else. Why not combine all of them and put it together? Paul E. is selling hardcore extreme. You must bleed, die and fall through six tables. Atlanta, I don't know what they're selling, whatever it is. It's a little more like very light without much drama. You can take the best of all these. Whatever authority Jim Ross has in the WWF, you obviously see it taken in a different direction. Having worked with him, he is a little more serious about it. That was some of the reasons I enjoyed working with the guy. That's how I look at the business. Vaudeville's dead and a few guys in our business should realize that. They are what killed it.

WP: How did you meet Cornette?

LT: Surprisingly enough at a fan club convention in '77. The WFIA held their '77 convention in Knoxville. Two of the fans were Eddie Gilbert and Jim Cornette. I met Jimmy later. I knew Eddie through is dad, who worked around Nashville. Jimmy, I've got a video I wanted to use on the Legends, but Jimmy wouldn't let me. I said, "I'll keep it for blackmail." (laughs) He won best photo by a wrestling fan in '77. We shot it for our show, so I had some copies. He never talked about it until he called for Smoky Mountain. He said, "You know, some of the things you talked about doing on TV in '77. I still want do to them." I think Jim's got a fertile mind.

WP: Oh yes. A hot head and a fertile mind.

LT: Yes, he does. Yes, he does. I told him last year at the Legends when he was having his fourth heart attack of the day.

"You having a cardiac arrest at the building. That's going to be the feature if you don't slow down." He overloads his circuits. I hear all the negative stuff. Hell, we've all got the dark side.

WP: I hear it all, but over the years, he's been nothing but a great guy and helpful to me. Maybe he's had his problem with other people, but I never seen that.

LT: He treats me with respect. At times, I'll go in a direction that he doesn't exactly foresee. But he respects me enough to know I'm doing it for a reason or that's the direction it's going and we're going to pick it up from there. The bottom line is as long as the job gets done. I understand when I was in my early thirties and got a chance to produce television. You get caught up in it. You're seeing this picture in your head. There's two sides to everybody. The thing they don't publicize, the sad part of the whole scenario, is like Fan Week last year. This young man in a wheelchair from Philadelphia, these people called and they wanted to come down. Expenses were running tight. Jimmy finally told them, "You get him here, we'll cover his hotel, his tickets. It's all on us." Nobody writes that. They write he did the baseball bat number on the window. You talk about two different personalities: the benevolent human being and the insane human being (laughs).

WP: Why do you think Smoky Mountain succeeds? Longevity in this business is success in itself.

LT: I think the situation there is they try to run the thread of believability through the thing. They're trying to sell that angle. Not just the character, but the personality. That's the whole basis. I think, David, it comes back to the way you educate your fans. Now, Vince and Ted are in a position to educate people all over the world. That wasn't the case before. My main time in the business was the Sixties into the late Seventies. You changed territories, sometimes you changed styles. Back then your ECW would have been Texas or Louisiana. Tampa was more amateur wrestling. That's the whole key. You have

to give it that believability. They're not doing that. That's what Jimmy's trying to do. That's why Paul E. is trying to do.

WP: But do you think ECW is believable?

LT: You see the blood and something that looks good and all of a sudden it gets past that. Yes, you're right. We were told one good punch is worth 50 mediocre ones. The right time thrown the right way. It's the same thing with ECW. It started with one table, then two tables, then two tables and a chair, then tables, a chair and a live body. I tell the kids I train, "I don't have a problem with some of these big bumps. But if it takes the whole match to set that one big bump up, it's not worth it." Some of the things they use for high spots were finishes.

WP: Some of the things used as transitions like a big suplex or a piledriver used to be finishes.

LT: Even you as a knowledgeable fan can get caught up in it, but they let you go because they were too interested in entertaining themselves. You educate the people. In ECW, if they're letting the inmates run the asylum, then it's out of control. Getting back to Leo Garabaldi, "You always have to give the people what they want, just never give it to them when they want it." That's how you hold onto the. If David Copperfield shows you how he made the Statue of Liberty disappear, you don't care anymore. That's our problem. You can't go back, but you can back up a little bit or tone it down a little bit. When George Scott took over as the booker in the Carolinas in the Seventies, he brought Johnny Valentine in. He was a very methodical worker. He didn't get warmed up for 20 minutes into a match. A short match for him was a half-hour. He worked singles. He didn't do tags. If you watched people the first few months he was in the Carolinas and they tried to get him over, they walked out. But a year later, they were selling out every building because they took the time to educate. The key word here is time. The worst thing is let's say I'm coming to your house to entertain you with bumps and I do my best stuff the

minute I walk through the door, where do I go from there? Backwards, because you can't top it. So if you give the Russian Chain, leave town, cut your nose off and divorce your wife, if you step across the line match, where do we go from there? I think those matches come around once, but you have to build to it.

WP: How did you get hooked up with Smoky Mountain?

LT: Initially, Timmy Horner, called me. I've known Timmy since he first started. He said they were putting together the operation and was wondering if I'd be interested. I said, "Sure." I'd been away from the business a little bit then, I was working with bodybuilders and a supplement line. I didn't start with them right away because we just couldn't work out the schedule. I finally was able to do a couple of specials they sold for video and we did the first Volunteer Slam and a tournament for their singles title. Phil Rainey, who is a local TV celebrity in Knoxville, he used to do the show with me in the Seventies. We did that first Volunteer Slam and a couple more. I did one of the Pikesville shows, the first one with Lance. I worked my way in. Bob (Caudle) got sick and I filled in for him, When Dutch Mantell went to Puerto Rico, I started full-time. I've been involved from almost the beginning. Jimmy has quite a collection of old tapes. Jimmy had taken some of his Knoxville tapes to show his partner and I was on the tapes. The guy said, "Who is that?" They got talking and that's how they got talking about using me. Of course, I'd been on that TV as a wrestler since '69 and a commentator for practically every promotion that had TV there. It was really enjoyable getting a chance to work with Ross. I never had the opportunity. You hear all sorts of things, pro and con. So you get to find out for yourself. It's been a good experience. Jimmy, for all his crazy (laughs) antics, I can't say anything bad. He has always treated me with respect. You can't do business with anyone you don't see eye-to-eye with. It's been a good experience.

WP: How long have you been doing the school?

LT: I started back in October. I thought a couple of times to do it. Actually, I was a little apprehensive at first. Once I got started, as my lady friend tells me, "You won't walk away. You love it." It's like they're my kids. I see the fire in their eyes and the enthusiasm in their conversation. I'm editing down high spots out of videos and running them down in slow-motion. We do film sessions. We work on psychology. When I went in it was all Frankensteiners and moonsaults. I said, "Let's go back to the mat and tie these things together. I don't care that you do them. I'm not adverse to them at all. You've got to have a longer match. If that's all you're going to do, you can't go very long." It's been a lot of fun. We're kind of limited now, but we're looking for another place. I want to take it to a different level.

WP: How many students do you have?

LT: On paper, 25. But, of course, everybody doesn't show up at the same time. We run Saturday and Sunday sessions. As we grow, we need to spread it out. I just started a talk radio show. Les Thatcher's Main Event Pro Wrestling Camp is the name of the school. That's the sponsor of the show, *Wrestler's Eye View* (Editors' note: *The show is currently on hiatus*). That came from the first wrestling column I ever wrote in the old Charlotte program in the Sixties. I got into a war of words with J.C. Dykes and worked a deal. It's on 1160AM in Florence, Kentucky, just across the river. Monday Nights, 10:30 to 11, a half hour, which is not enough, but they're trying to move it around. That's a lot of fun. I did a fitness show last year with a chiropractor friend of mine. We run show once a month at the school so the guys get used to working in front of a card with 40 to 50 people. Kind of like what Al Snow has. That guy has a good head on his shoulders. He's got old-style values. He's got a good operation.

WP: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

LT: I do want to comment on *Perspective*.

How impressed I was with the language. I thought I was reading the *Wall Street Journal* instead of a wrestling paper. I picked it up on friend's coffee table and I had never seen the title and I said, "Can I take this with me?" He said, "Yeah." I really didn't get a chance to read it that evening. I got home for the trip. I sat down and said, "Wow." It was your anniversary issue. It gave me a little insight as well. I was very impressed with it. That's an evolution that occurred when I was away from the business for a little bit. They came in with the sheets and I know my friend Ole (laughs) wanted to challenge them. I think everybody's entitled to their opinion and I don't agree with everybody. My only tick with this is I think some of these critiques should be titled, "My Opinion" as opposed to being an actual review of the business. My biggest complains is I hear some of the guys getting knocked on work rate. That's a new catch phrase in the business. But you've got to take everything into account. Did this guy get any sleep last night? Is his leg killing him? There's a multitude of things.

WP: *I don't necessarily agree with rating matches with stars.*

LT: It goes back to what you like and let's face it, those guys don't know good or bad.

WP: *I know what I like.*

LT: Exactly, exactly. I enjoy reading some of the fans' opinions. Scary enough, I agree with them (laughs). That's the bottom line to this business anyway. That's why when I was asked to those WFIA things or to emcee some of them, I said, "Sure." If it wasn't for the fans, there wouldn't be a business. I think there's a place for the papers. It's a shame the whole thing can't work together.

WP: *From when we started five years ago, it's come a long way.*

LT: Reading in your anniversary issue, the Lou Thesz interview... I enjoyed the hell out of that. It was like talking to Lou. Lou's quite a gentleman. I enjoyed hearing about the old guys. Those of us in the business instead of worrying about who's the marks, sometimes we end up being the marks because of that. Don't sell the general viewing public short. When you do, you're making a big mistake. We all need to read these things and really take them to heart. Like you said, when you give a guy two stars, that's nonsense. It's not necessary. But when a fan writes, "I paid \$24.95 for this and it was horrendous," pay attention. He may not pay it again. It's a service-oriented business. We're selling you a product, but we have to sell you something that you're interested in. I think the business will go full circle. I think the

territories will come back or at least I hope so. There's a lot of talent out there. I tell these guys that I train, "You may have a lot of talent and may never make a full-time occupation out of it. However, if you enjoy it..." Ron Wright in East Tennessee kept a job at Kodak for years and still made quite a bit of money just wrestling within 100 miles of his home. So it's not impossible. It's a different era, but you still have to sell the basics and pay a little more attention. What you guys are writing, you don't do it in a pacifist role. But from an ex-wrestler's standpoint, you're not offensive in getting my attention. You're not coming on like, "I'm the expert. Who the hell are you?" I'm a great Celtics fan and I played high school basketball, but I don't think I can tell Larry Bird how to sharpen his game. That's the problem with this. Some of these guys are reading their press clippings. I see a place for it, and it's part of the change. With your sheet, I was extremely impressed because it does something I've tried to do: add respectability to our business. It's not a circus. At some point we'll see that and business will pick up. I think you guys have been a big help in that respect and I think we need to cater to that a little bit more too.

WP: *Thank you Les.*

LT: Thank you. I really enjoyed it.

A Different Perspective - By Mike Lano

The Gentle Photos

The Wrestling Dentist, Dr. Mike Lano, has been a wrestling photojournalist since 1968 and has contributed to just about all of the U.S. wrestling magazines during the Seventies and Eighties. He currently shoots for Bill Apter, Wrestling World, Gong, Powerslam and Superstars newsstand magazines. Inspired by the Phantom of the Ring's series on Wrestling Eye, Mike has decided to share his memories about some of the more colorful

photographers in the wrestling business. We hope you enjoy his different perspective.

The Phantom of the Ring's articles about the Wrestling Eye in Wrestling Perspective #52 & #53 actually triggered me to write this article. His history of the publication was insightful. There have been pieces on levels of fans and there is no questioning the top tier

has to contain Georgiann Makropoulos, Tom Burke, Diane Devine as the kingpins. Tom Burke's accomplishments could merit a whole issue of Wrestling Perspective, from writing to editing to being one of the greatest wrestling historians with the largest wrestling collection I've ever encountered. But, I can't recall anyone ever writing a piece on wrestling's photographers, many of whom

are just as much heroes to us as Bruno Sammartino, Lou Thesz, Bruiser, John Tolos, and Freddie Blassie. With that in mind, and also in hopes that Burke will also take a stab at this, I've decided to look at some of wrestling's greatest photographers.

Tony Lanza out of Montreal remains my all-time photo god. Originally a very talented mat practitioner, he began taking the best studio/posed and action shots. They were so unique, you knew he took the picture even before you saw his famous credit signatures. Lou Thesz, Killer Kowalski, Don Leo Jonathan, Hans Schmidt, Bronco Nagurski, Bulldog Lee Hennig, the Sheik and Johnny Valentine all sat for him and the poses he created of for the wrestlers was masterful. He was a superb pioneering visionary behind the lens. His only equivalent, who is one of the most prolific photographers anywhere, has to be Koichi Yoshizawa, whose gentle grace and action photos from the Seventies to the present for *Gong*, *Weekly Fight* and every U.S. magazine set standards of his own.

George Napolitano began a wonderful career by taking the magazine matworld by storm, often overexposing himself and his writing by being everywhere at once. There was not a *Ring Wrestling* without Napolitano's work and he was definitely the Seventies and Eighties WWF king. He had so many pieces published in so many magazines that he often had to use his wife's (Jacqueline Quartano) or his dog Pupo's name. Later he may have used his kids' names to get everything in, but what a living he made and what things he accomplished. Along with the legendary Bill Apter, Napolitano was perhaps the first big name photographer to travel. He publicized Puerto Rico's WWC with frequent trips and cemented friendships with Abdullah The Butcher, Bruiser Brody, and the Funks, with heretofore unheard of P.R. for this hot territory. Several years ago, he began putting his own complete line of newsstand magazines and books that are collectors items, most notably his *Main Event* classic with Bob Backlund and Superstar Billy Graham on the cover. Napolitano has published at least five books to date and has

the personal touch of shots of the greats posed with him.

The Phantom's near-sighted editor at *Wrestling Eye* wrongly called Gene Gordon an "illiterate hillbilly," as most of the boys loved the eccentric Gordon more than any other photographer and called him a friend. Each of the "old-timers" had such a style that you could recognize their shots immediately. As each territory had their area superstars, each territory also had their own unique photojournalists. While Gordon specialized in lady wrestling shots that were the respected athletic standard for the business, he also covered Jim Crockett's Carolinas like no other. I treasure the shots of Hawk Hanson, Tiger Conway Jr., Harley Race and Ric Flair taken by Gordon. Other regional photographers included Lil Al Vavasour, who covered Danny Hodge, Bill Watts, and the gang for LeRoy McGuirk's Oklahoma and Louisiana territories. Roger Deem in St. Louis was an Eddie Gilbert mark. For pictures at the Kiel Auditorium, Roger and John Tocco were the kings. Then there was Dave Burzynski in Detroit, who also became a manager.

Apter may claim to have "just started" with Stanley Weston's magazines in 1971, but I think he began in the late Sixties. He's been to Japan, and like Napolitano, goes to nearly every big show and pay-per-view, recently hitting SMW's Superbowl. How many times have you heard "Apter this" or "Apter mags?" Well, no one came up with more sensational covers, dripped in blood, guts and gore, or got over more superstars than Apter. From 1972 on, he has ruled the newsstand and has had the most up to date high quality stuff available. So what if many of the articles are a sensationalized work? We always checked out the G.C. London publications, AKA the Apter mags, for the great shots. Who will ever forget the shots in Madison Square Garden or Boston of Bill with Pampero Firpo, Lou Albano, or King Curtis? Not just one of the best photographers ever, Apter has also taught new talent behind the lens like Jason Ross Lavin. Apter and Napolitano have contributed more to wrestling's modern day than most and deserve our thanks and respect.

My backyard mentors were *Gong's* Dan Westbrook and longtimer Theo Ehret. Westbrook married a beautiful Japanese lady during one of his visits to heaven, and put on so much weight because of her cooking, he pretty much quit the business. Ehret shot for Stan Weston and Apter since time began. Between the three of us, Ehret, Westbrook and I kept Lebell program maker, Jeff Walton, full of great shots during the Seventies.

Both Ehret and Gordon past away, with the whereabouts of their negatives a mystery. Vavasour's negatives were sold by the family to a friend in Atlanta.

For a while in 1973, Gary Dubin was on his way to becoming a well published photographer for Apter and the Big Book of W publishers, but quit after only a year, and now does phone sex ads and Jessica Hahn sex lines. Dubin and I shot the last great talent period of Lebell when it seemed Los Angeles was booked by a combination of the Sheik and Eduard Carpentier in 1974. Firpo, Ernie Ladd, Tolos, Greg Valentine, Andre the Giant, Dino Bravo, the Wolfman, Killer Brooks were all there, as was that bogus "Real World Tournament." We also shot one of the beloved Bobby Shane's last matches, when he did a couple of jobs, giving Carpentier his best Los Angeles match.

How about Nineties superstars like Eddie Gilbert, Jim Cornette and Paul E. Dangerously? They were well-known to *Ring Wrestling* aficionados before actually getting involved in the business; the former two bonafide legends. Perhaps perfecting photojournalism honed the genius and creativity level of all three.

Former great WFLA President Mike Gratchner really ruled the AWA, and was always gracious putting us up when we came to shoot Verne Gagne in Chicago. He was adept at both stills and 35 millimeter, and has many great tapes as does John Arezzi, and Mark Dawson. If I've left out great writers/publishers like Norm Kietzer, Jim Melby, Kathy O'Down and other fans/writers, please forgive me. Better yet, write in and add your own insights on some of the best fans, writers, publishers and photographers ever to grace the pages of a wrestling magazine.

THE PHANTOM OF THE RING

The Deep Thinker Of Buffalo, Wyoming

There is an old adage to the effect that if you repeat something often enough and with enough authority, eventually it will be believed no matter how farfetched it may be. A prime example of this adage is Clarence Eklund's daughter, Hazel Odegard. In her role as her father's de facto press agent, she has given new meaning to the word "farfetched."

The first time I came across her was in Earle Yetter's column in the old *Wrestling Revue*. That should give you some idea as to how long she's been at it. At any rate, she was certainly welcome news to old Earle because she gave him something to write about. (Anyone who's ever read Earle's column knows what I mean.) Others may remember her articles about her father in Norman Kietzer's *Wrestling News* (may it rest in peace). With the demise of these magazines, the publicity wells have dried up, thus she has taken to writing a book: *Wyoming's Wrestling Rancher: Life and History of Clarence Eklund, Champion Wrestler*, available only through mail order by sending \$24.95 to Hazel Odegard at 195 Pine, Buffalo, Wyoming, 82834.

The first thing I noticed after reading the book was that she hadn't changed her tune one note over the years. For those lucky enough not to have heard it, the gist of it (as well as the book) goes something like this: "My Father Was The Greatest/Much Better Than The Latest/He Was The Champ And Really Swell/But They Only Remember Ad Santel/Ad Gypped My Pop And That Is True/So I Am Writing All Of This Just To Tell You." So why buy the book? Two words: Clarence Eklund.

Eklund was one the better wrestlers of his time, a holder of the Light Heavyweight Championship, whose reputation as a wrestler made him somewhat of a drawing

card in an era when ballyhoo was limited. But the heights of his fame in this country ended shortly before World War I. The style of slam bang wrestling created after the war to cater to the tastes of the Roaring Twenties passed him by and left him in the resin dust of obscurity.

Given these circumstances, and the fact he refused to participate in the new order of things, Eklund turned to touring. He was a particular success Down Under and it was while in Australia that he would experience his one last gasp of fame. He won the World's Light Heavyweight Championship in a tournament, pinning archival Santel in the process.

Returning to the States he found no market for his championship, and, because he wouldn't cooperate with the Trust, he was also blacklisted. Unable to secure worthy opponents and the resultant big paydays, Eklund retired in 1929. Upon his retirement a couple of years later, he was almost completely forgotten - erased from the collective consciousness, as it were. He turned to a life of farming and writing, with one disastrous plunge into politics. Most of his writings were included in Odegard's book, including a short manuscript entitled "My Forty Years in Wrestling," which by itself is worth the price of the book. An insightful, if myopic, remembrance of his wrestling days, "My Forty Years in Wrestling" seems as if it was intended to be much longer; perhaps as part of an autobiography. Though slanted from his perspective, it is a fascinating peek into the early years of wrestling. Just don't ask for honesty. There is no way Eklund was going to spill the proverbial beans.

After reading "My Forty Years of Wrestling," I quickly realized Eklund was fulfilling a quest. This quest was to defeat

Santel. Eklund seemed possessed with the idea of beating Santel, almost as if old Ad were the Holy Grail. To hear Clarence tell it, he was an honest wrestler in honest times. Oh, Ad was honest, too, but scared to meet Clarence at his weight (175 lbs.). Santel was about 10 pounds heavier, and unwilling to meet others such as Ted Thye at the lighter weight. Well, Eklund finally wore Ad down to where Ad dropped the weight, and Eklund defeated him in a match, or to hear Eklund tell it, "Santel learned more in that match about wrestling at 175 pounds than he had learned in 15 years of talking of wrestling at that weight." Eklund then goes on to mention that the next week he defeated Thye during a tour of Australia for the Light Heavyweight title and held it until his retirement in 1929. But how honest was it? The Australian tour was promoted by Al Haft, who probably never had an honest day in his life. The story on Haft was that he wrestled as Young Gotch. The reality was that Haft used to pass himself off as the Frank Gotch in areas that had never seen Gotch. If the audience became wise, Al retreated to the name "Young Gotch." Wrestling was no more honest in Eklund's heyday than it is today, no matter what he claimed. Even if he said wrestling was a work, I doubt his daughter would've printed it.

Broken down into several sections, one of the more interesting portions of the book is a history of the wrestling times of Eklund, written by Bill Sporis, a sportswriter and friend of Eklund, which says a lot about his impartiality. But there are 37 capsule profiles of Eklund's various competitors which give us a valued insight into a period of wrestling we know little about. This is followed by a compilation of articles written about Eklund during the Twenties, and some written later than that. The articles are fine, but this is where the book should have ended.

Eklund's story would have made a fine chapter in a history of wrestling. Instead, his life has ended up overexposed in a book penned by a daughter intent on making his life into the stuff of which tragic heroes are made. That's the good news. The bad news is that in her attempt to chronicle her father's life, she not only includes his wrestling career, but also his family life and his various scribbles on politics and religion. Eklund may have been a superb wrestler, but he clearly was not a thinker, and Odegard's attempts to paint him as a "Socrates of the Sagebrush" come off as an incredible pomposity. She mentions in one chapter that her brother tried to discourage her from writing a book about her Dad's life. After reading her effort, it's a wonder why he wasn't more persistent.

As a result, we are treated to pages and pages of Eklund's views on everything from politics to health to economics. The chapter containing this begins with a photo of Eklund in later years underneath which is a caption which reads as follows:

Clarence Eklund's great mind kept him absorbed in reading and writing about the economy, the banking structure and the political scene. Voters' minds were being

controlled and manipulated through radio and newspaper media. Dad realized democracy was being taken away from the people. He was passionate in writing and fighting against this.

How Eklund ever missed out on the Nobel Prizes in these subjects is still a mystery to this day. Maybe his daughter can chalk it up the General International Conspiracy which has always existed to keep good men such as her father down and out.

In reality, Eklund had a very ordinary mind. He ran for political office on the Socialist ticket and was trounced for the effort. He was a passionate defender of Soviet Russia and believed that its principles should be instituted here. (These principles worked so well that the first chance the Soviets got to change their system of government, they did so with what might mildly be called reckless enthusiasm. If history has taught us anything, it is that man is not perfectible.) He also detested capitalism, especially in the form of "big banking." Quotes from a booklet called *The Truth About Money*, which was in his personal library, are reprinted. They allude to *The House of Rothschild* and "alien-minded bankers." Both are synonyms for Jews and were part and parcel of the Anti-Semitic movements

of the Thirties. Combined with Eklund's view's on health, his thoughts appear to eerily parallel those of Dr. Josef Goebbels (once referred to by fellow Nazi, Gregor Strasser, as a "Beefcake Nazi" - Brown (shirted) on the outside, pink on the inside) rather than any other mainstream thinker.

If you think his political views are wacky, wait until you see his views on health. He seemed convinced about vasectomies to the point where we are treated to a photo of a vasectomy operation in the book. Charming. Daughter also extols father's views on health while at the same time mentioning ever so softly that he had a drinking problem at one time. So much for health.

As if this were not enough, Daughter then goes on to present a compilation of title matches that make no sense and an Addendum containing her own views which makes even less sense, if that is possible by this point in the book. Were there other books on this period of time available, I would easily tell you to avoid this one like the Ebola virus. However, given the reality of historical information, the wisest course is to buy the book for its wrestling history. The rest you can safely laugh at from the comfort of your home.

Our next issue is a special "interview only" issue featuring candid conversations with Brad Armstrong and Gordon Solie. Don't Miss It!!!

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